



2021 CONNECTICUT GROWN PROMOTIONAL INITIATIVES ANNUAL REPORT

C.G.S Sec. 22-38a. A report to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to the environment

PREPARED BY THE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT UNIT OF THE
CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

INTRODUCTION

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture (DoAg) promotes Connecticut Grown farm products through a variety of programs and initiatives to increase the awareness of, and demand for, Connecticut Grown farm products. These programs and initiatives include but are not limited to the components outlined in Connecticut General Statutes Sec. 22-38a (see below), and other related initiatives under the Connecticut Grown Program umbrella.

CONNECTICUT GENERAL STATUTES Sec. 22-38a. Promotion of Connecticut-Grown farm products. Regulations. The Commissioner of Agriculture shall establish and administer a program to promote the marketing of farm products grown and produced in Connecticut for the purpose of encouraging the development of agriculture in the state. The commissioner may, within available appropriations, provide a grant-in-aid to any person, firm, partnership or corporation engaged in the promotion and marketing of such farm products, provided the words "CONNECTICUT-GROWN" or "CT-Grown" are clearly incorporated in such promotional and marketing activities. The commissioner shall (1) provide for the design, plan and implementation of a multiyear, state-wide marketing and advertising campaign, including, but not limited to, television and radio advertisements, promoting the availability of, and advantages of purchasing, Connecticut-grown farm products, (2) establish and continuously update a web site connected with such advertising campaign that includes, but is not limited to, a comprehensive listing of Connecticut farmers' markets, pick-your-own farms, roadside and on-farm markets, farm wineries, garden centers and nurseries selling predominantly Connecticut-grown horticultural products and agri-tourism events and attractions, and (3) conduct efforts to promote interaction and business relationships between farmers and restaurants, grocery stores, institutional cafeterias and other potential institutional purchasers of Connecticut-grown farm products, including, but not limited to, (A) linking farmers and potential purchasers through a separate feature of the web site established pursuant to this section, and (B) organizing state-wide or regional events promoting Connecticut-grown farm products, where farmers and potential institutional customers are invited to participate. The commissioner shall use his best efforts to solicit cooperation and participation from the farm, corporate, retail, wholesale and grocery communities in such advertising, Internet-related and event planning efforts, including, but not limited to, soliciting private sector matching funds. The commissioner shall use all of the funds provided to the Department of Agriculture pursuant to subparagraph (C) of subdivision (5) of subsection (a) of section 4-66aa for the purposes of this section. The commissioner shall report annually to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to the environment on issues with respect to efforts undertaken pursuant to the requirements of this section, including, but not limited to, the amount of private matching funds received and expended by the department. The commissioner may adopt, in accordance with chapter 54, such regulations as he deems necessary to carry out the purposes of this section.

The following is a summary of work and supporting efforts undertaken by the agency throughout 2021.

Multiyear, Statewide Marketing and Advertising Campaign: **2021 CT GROWN CAMPAIGN**

Program Overview

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture established the CT Grown program in 1986. Over the last 36 years, the brand and logo have undergone minimal updates and consistent multi-media messaging has been lacking. The last update in 2015 to the CT Grown logo, gave it a minimal update and established brand identity standards. Gov. Lamont's Transition Committee on Agricultural Policy identified the need to launch an agricultural umbrella campaign to highlight CT Grown products.

In 2020, the agency partnered with Miranda Creative, Inc., a women-owned, Norwich, CT, based company to execute a total rebranding and marketing campaign for Connecticut Grown and the agricultural industry.



2021 Accomplishments

During 2021, the following accomplishments were achieved on behalf of the Connecticut Grown rebranding and marketing campaign. Of most notable, the campaign's goal was to reach 100 million impressions; which was exceeded with over 112,000,000 impressions to date

- **Conducted extensive research** including three different surveys and four hours of focus groups to develop a new tagline and rebranded of the logo;
- **Established buy-in from the industry** through targeted outreach and inclusion;
- **Updated both the consumer and agency logos;**
- **Launched the rebranded Connecticut Grown** program in March 2021;
- **Grew social media** with 2,191 new Facebook followers, and created Instagram page with 1,712 followers to date;
- Negotiated a unique **digital billboard** contract allowing state-wide exposure at a fraction of the cost by adopting cancelled/open spaces with visibility in Hartford, Meriden, New Haven, Fairfield, Waterbury, Farmington, and East Hartford;
- **Garnered diverse media coverage** from major broadcast television networks, print media and radio;
- **Engaged with producers** by providing marketing workshops to assist their brand development and incorporate CT Grown branding; and
- **Achieved well-rounded marketing exposure** by utilizing billboards, press releases, earned media, website, radio, broadcast TV, display advertising, search advertising, digital streaming, email marketing and social media (paid and organic) as well as event promotion at the Big E.

**The campaign's goal was to reach 100 million impressions -
and it has generated 112,000,000 in nine months**

The 2021 campaign also established a number of 'firsts' for the agency and consumer facing brand:

- Designed the **first consumer website**, www.CTGrown.org with more than 47,000 pageviews since the March 2021 launch;
- Created the **first blog and events listing** on the consumer website;
- **Integrated CT Grown with CTVisit.com** to give agritourism a voice in state-wide visitor messaging;
- Developed the agency's **first photo/video pantry** featuring multiple farms, restaurants and farm stands throughout the state. These assets were shared with farms that hosted us to obtain these photos;
- Created the **first analytics dashboard, integrating Google analytics and Mailchimp** to optimize performance;
- Designed and sent **first consumer emails** to more than 640,000 email addresses with 12,557 click-throughs, capturing our first retargeted IP capture process and developed a subscriber list of 3,728 Mailchimp subscribers averaging **34.47% open rate**;
- Implemented **first search campaign using keywords** to establish retargeted display advertising to further messaging and branding impact with a total of 238,264 impressions and overall CTR of 3.34%;
- Leveraged **first digital display campaign** to generate more than 1.408 million impressions across devices and web; and
- Established **first creative pantry** including templates and standards for brand, social media posts, billboards, digital ads, videos, radio scripts, stationery, specialty items, outreach, blogs, e-newsletters and more.

2021 Highlights | Consumer/Dept Brand



2021 Highlights | First Photo/Video Pantry

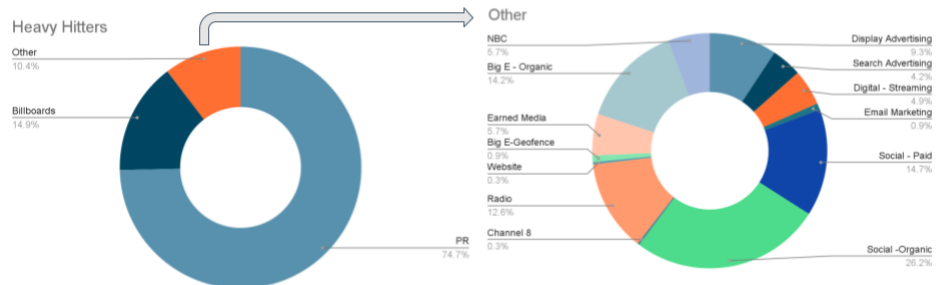


Providing the Department, and the producers YEARS of images/video content and a strong sense of pride.

CONNECTICUT GROWN
Miranda Creative

2021 Highlights | Total Marketing

- Total media impressions (not including CTVisit) : 112,185,857+



CONNECTICUT GROWN
Miranda Creative

2021 Highlights | First Digital Display Campaign

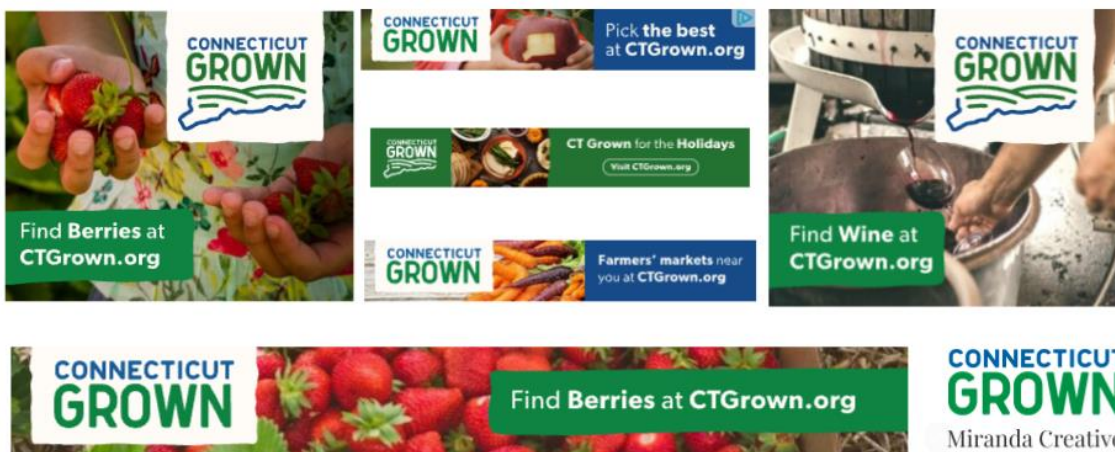
Display advertising leverages site retargeting of CTGrown.org visitors to generate impressions across devices & web.

Total Impressions
1,408,310

Total Clicks
1,668

Overall CTR
0.12%

Google Display Ad Benchmark (DoubleClick) = 0.05%



Miranda Creative

DoAg also engaged with Crested Communications, a student-run agency through the University of Hartford, on a marketing product to develop, without cost to the Department, a **Farmers First** multimedia toolkit. The Farmers First campaign has a concentrated focus on engaging farmers, educating the public, and engaging the public in new ways to bring the community closer to the CT Grown brand.

The **Farmers First** toolkit includes the following:

- Social media posts, including “Did You Know?” content to better educate followers of CT Grown about Connecticut agriculture and aquaculture;
- PSA videos, including a 4-minute documentary with a Connecticut grower and 60-second PSA to share information about Connecticut farms;
- CT Grown flyer with CT ag facts and QR code to learn more at CTGrown.org;
- Recommendations for a CT Grown podcast with potential topics;
- CT Grown Welcome Box to show appreciation for the farmers involved with the CT Grown campaign and encourage additional participation by including CT Grown swag items and sharing how they can participate on social media;
- Recommendation for a CT Grown Ambassador Program, open to both farmers and consumers, to promote CT Grown; and
- CT Grown recipe cards showcasing how to prepare and cook with CT Grown farm products.


The **Farmers First** toolkit took the branding and graphic look and feel of the larger CT Grown campaign and highlighted areas where there was an opportunity for growth.



STUFFED PEPPERS

INGREDIENTS

- 4 large Bell Peppers
- 1 pound 80% lean Ground Meat
- 2 tablespoon Chopped Onion
- 1 cup Cooked Rice
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 clove Garlic, finely chopped
- 1 can (15oz) Tomato Sauce
- 3/4 cup shredded Mozzarella Cheese



CONNECTICUT GROWN

| PREP TIME | COOK TIME | TOTAL TIME | TOTAL SERVINGS |
|-----------|-----------|------------|----------------|
| 10 mins | 30 mins | 40 mins | 4 servings |

STEP 1
Heat oven to 350°F, then cut a thin slice from the stem end of each bell pepper to remove the top of the pepper. Remove seeds and membranes; rinse peppers. If necessary, cut a thin slice from the bottom of each pepper so they stand up straight. In a 4-quart Dutch oven, add enough water to cover peppers. Heat to boiling; add peppers. Cook for about 2 minutes; drain.

STEP 2
In a 10-inch skillet, cook beef and onion over medium heat for 8 to 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until beef is brown; drain. Stir in rice, salt, garlic, and 1 cup of tomato sauce; cook until hot.

STEP 3
Stuff peppers with beef mixture. Stand peppers upright in an ungreased 8-inch square glass baking dish. Pour remaining tomato sauce over peppers.

STEP 4
Cover tightly with foil. Bake 10 minutes. Uncover and bake about 15 minutes longer or until peppers are tender. Sprinkle with cheese.

2022 Goals & Initiatives

In 2022, DoAg will continue the CT Grown campaign with a more targeted approach to maximize the available budget. A summary of accomplishments and a survey soliciting industry feedback will be released to those that were originally solicited during the initial RFP development for the campaign. The results and feedback of that survey, in addition to the feedback and recommendations of Miranda Communications will go into the 2022 campaign.

It is expected that approximately \$75,000 will be available for 2022's campaign and expect 28,000,000 impressions .

Additionally, DoAg will continue working with Crested Communications through the University of Hartford to engage Connecticut producers utilizing the Farmers First toolkit developed in 2021 and creating additional resources to meet the needs of the industry.

Anticipated Risks and Interdependences

- Contracting process for renewal of campaign
- Industry buy-in/engagement
- Consumer response related to continued COVID-19 concerns



Multiyear, Statewide Marketing and Advertising Campaign: **ADDITIONAL AGENCY RADIO, DIGITAL, PRINT, EVENT, SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISEMENTS & OUTREACH**

Program Overview

Farmers' Market Nutrition Program Specific Outreach: The Connecticut Department of Agriculture (DoAG) conducted promotion of the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), Connecticut Grown farm products and farmers' markets with support from Department of Social Services (DSS) Office of Skill Development (OSD) to reach low-income seniors and eligible WIC households through the DMV Visix Network. This was done in partnership with the CT Department of Public Health's WIC program targeting consumer awareness of fresh CT Grown produce available at farmers' markets.

DoAg worked with OSD to create two looping presentations on the DMV's Visix Network screens at DMV locations throughout the state. The first announced the availability of the program and encouraged use of benefits and the second video reminded participants of the program end date and to use benefits before the expire. Each graphic appeared on screen for 20 seconds for readability and available in both English and Spanish.

DoAg worked with a state vendor, Camelo Communications, to update the Urban FMNP graphics created in 2020 using the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) to include the new CT Grown logo and translation.

English version:



Spanish version:



Farm-to-Chef: In 2021, the agency's Farm-to-Chef program promoted its annual Farm-to-Chef week at dining venues through the state from August 29-September 4 through a variety of digital advertisements including on WNPR's, *Seasoned*.

CT Apple Marketing Board and CT Apples: The Connecticut Apple Marketing Board promoted CT Grown apples and orchards through 11 social media posts to promote the state's orchards as a COVID safe, family-friendly activity. These reached nearly 2,900 followers across both Facebook and Instagram platforms.

The agency's seven social media pages were utilized to keep Connecticut Grown products and information at the forefront of consumers' minds reaching more than 2.96 million people across Facebook and Instagram platforms.

In 2021, CT Grown-related social media posts reached 2.96+ million people between Facebook and Instagram

2021 Accomplishments

Farmers' Market Nutrition Program



DoAg worked with OSD to insert FMNP promotions on the VISIX system monitors to run in DSS offices throughout the state. Promotions ran from July 13, 2021 through October 31, 2021, in both English and Spanish. Graphics were revised for the month of October to remind participants that the deadline to redeem checks was approaching.

Farm to Chef: DoAg promoted Farm-to-Chef Week on WNPR with a total of 20 Sponsor IDs on promos, 2 Sponsor IDs before *Seasoned* show, 24 15-second spots and a digital banner on the Seasoned webpage and WNPR.org and in the WNPR weekly e-newsletter at a total cost of \$3,000.

Connecticut Apple Marketing Board: The Connecticut Apple Marketing Board maintained a Facebook page with 13,421 followers. During 2021 DoAg posted to the page 11 times with 4,528 impressions.

Overall agency promotion: Across the agency's seven Facebook pages (only), there are more than 36,775 followers with a total reach more than 2.21 million in 2021.



2022 Goals & Initiatives

- To consolidate the number of Facebook pages to better align with overall Connecticut Grown campaign and agency initiatives.
- To increase the total number of social media (Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, etc.) followers by 5% and increase total social media reach by 10%.
- To successfully amplify the overall Connecticut Grown campaign through program/industry specific promotions.
- Involve the CAMB more in CT Grown for CT Kids Week to encourage students to get out to CT orchards.

Anticipated Risks and Interdependences

While the programs above have a direct correlation to CT Grown or the CT Grown statute, funding for each of program is dependent on federal grant funds, programmatic income, or stand-alone legislation. As a result, the amount available to spend for marketing varies annually making the overall impact inconsistent and therefore challenging. As social media platforms change their user experience, there are shifts in the effectiveness of paid campaigns as well.

Multiyear, Statewide Marketing and Advertising Campaign: CONNECTICUT GROWN STORE

Program Overview

In 2014 DoAg launched the Connecticut Grown Store, a dedicated marketplace for Connecticut Grown apparel and merchandise, to help promote the Connecticut Grown brand. Sales are used to replenish inventory and help sustain the project.

The launch of the new CT Grown logo in March 2021 was the catalyst for new items being added to the store, including apparel for men, women, infants, and children, as well as producer items to promote CT Grown, including tents and flags. Many items were offered as pre-order and sold out before their arrival. Merchandise and producer items were promoted through social media and the CT Weekly Agricultural Report. Additional updates were made to the website to reflect the new logo and tagline, as well as updated images of merchandise.

To view the store please visit:
<https://connecticutgrownstore.com/>

2021 Accomplishments

- During 2021, the online store **processed 230 transactions totaling more than \$13,190.**
- The store was promoted and online sales were encouraged at fall fairs, including Big E.
- **Added new inventory** to website including apparel and farmer products, flags and tents, with the updated CT Grown logo.
- The **most popular items on the store were POP signs, which are offered at no cost to farmers with free shipping**, as well as items with the new logo, including CT Grown tents, baseball hats, knit winter hats, and t-shirts.
- CT Milk Promotion Board began offering promotional items for producers and dairy focused events and educational opportunities at no cost.

2022 Goals & Initiatives

- Replenish apparel inventory with updated CT Grown logo
- Increase sales by 10%
- Design and source at least one custom item for CT Grown Forestry
- Offer at least one new CT Grown merchandise product for sale
- Reassess current calculation for shipping costs and develop new calculation
- Assign new postage codes to better track shipping costs among various programs

Anticipated Risks and Interdependences

- Increased pricing for merchandise will impact the return on the product and the price point at which product can be offered.
- Continued supply chain shortages and disruptions for sourcing products in a timely manner from vendors.

Multiyear, Statewide Marketing and Advertising Campaign: **DISTRIBUTION OF THE WEEKLY AGRICULTURAL REPORT**

Program Overview

The Connecticut Weekly Agricultural Report was established in the 1920's and has more than editions produced as the agency's primary form of communication to the industry, partners, and constituents than any other regular Department communication.

The Ag Report includes:

- notable articles about Connecticut agriculture
- educational opportunities and program news from the agency
- press highlights
- produce, meat and poultry auction and wholesale pricing
- industry sponsored events and announcements
- state, federal and philanthropic grant opportunities, and
- industry sponsored events

It also includes job opportunities and advertisement related to the industry.

2021 Accomplishments

The Connecticut Weekly Agricultural Report transitioned to an all-digital platform in 2020, using Mailchimp as the production and distribution platform. Print subscriptions remain discontinued to reduce the overall program expenses and subscribers have been encouraged to sign up for a free digital subscription.

In 2021, the weekly publication was again utilized to deliver information to the industry as the pandemic and public health restrictions continued to change. This was also a valuable tool for communicating local, state, and federal resources – including natural disaster declarations due to excessive rainfall and COVID-19 support for various agricultural sectors impacted. Additionally, the Ag Report was crucial to share information on how producers could engage with the CT Grown campaign and reporting the progress on that effort.

Lastly, a translated version of the CT Weekly Agricultural Report, available in Spanish, is now available each week on the website as a PDF to reach a more diverse audience of producers with valuable information and resources.

**For the first time in
Ag Report history, a
translated Spanish
version is now
available weekly for
the CT Weekly
Agricultural Report**

- 50 issues of the Connecticut Weekly Agricultural Report were distributed.
- A total of \$1,818.50 in advertising revenue was received.
- Average open rate of 29.24 % with a total of 37,172 opens
- Average click rate of 6.58% with a total of 8,352 clicks

2022 Goals & Initiatives

- Increase advertising revenue by 10%
- Increase subscribers by 10%
- Increase the average open rate by 3%
- Increase the average click rate by 3%
- Assess the current format for ADA compliance, develop protocols to maintain that compliance
- Obtain updated livestock auction prices on a weekly basis
- Offer Spanish translated version using tags for direct conversion in email.

Anticipated Risks and Interdependences

Subscribers are overwhelmed by emails, making it challenging to ensure all information is consumed. Additionally, not all producers are savvy with digital services or have lack of access to technology. We are also dependent upon an outside service provider (MailChimp) and DAS to ensure access to the platform. Content, especially livestock pricing, is dependent upon responsiveness of non DoAg staff members.

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CONNECTICUT WEEKLY AGRICULTURAL REPORT

The latest news and updates in Connecticut agriculture

Presentado por el Departamento de Agricultura de Connecticut.
Versión en español disponible en línea en CTGrown.gov.

En este asunto

23 de diciembre de 2021; Vol. D, No. 50

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[Orientación COVID-19](#)

[Encuesta a productores de hortalizas](#)

[Subvenciones para la promoción de productos lácteos](#)

[Certificado de producción de hortalizas](#)

[Precios del mercado agrícola](#)

[Anuncios](#)

[Próximos Eventos](#)



Nuestras oficinas estarán cerradas el viernes 24 de diciembre de 2021 y el viernes 31 de diciembre de 2021, en observancia de las vacaciones. El informe agrícola semanal de CT se reanudará la semana del 3 de enero de 2022. ¡Feliz año nuevo!

[View this email in your browser](#)



CONNECTICUT WEEKLY AGRICULTURAL REPORT

The latest news and updates in Connecticut agriculture

Brought to you by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture
Version en español disponible en línea en CTGrown.gov.

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Our offices will be closed on Friday, December 24, 2021, and Friday, December 31, 2021, in observance of the holidays. The CT Weekly Ag Report will resume the week of January 3, 2022. Happy New Year!

Continuously Updated Website: CTGROWN.GOV & CTGROWNMAP.COM



Program Overview

CT.gov/DoAg and CTGrown.gov: CTGrown.gov and CT.gov/DoAg are domains assigned to the Department of Agriculture's online homepage. Information cataloged here includes every facet of the department from the Commissioner and legislation, to regulatory and licensing, as well as grant and program administration. A new website administrator was identified to take over website maintenance and develop a navigation and information flow, new design for information access that will be more easily navigated by our audience.

CTGrownMap.com: As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, DoAg partnered with the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Connecticut (NOFA) in 2020 to improve accessibility of CT Grown farm products and expand the list of farms, farmers' markets, and farm stands beyond the current CT NOFA membership - free of charge and online. As the pandemic has languished on and supply chain shortages have continued to create challenges for consumers the map has become a crucial resource for sourcing CT Grown farm products.

2021 Accomplishments

CTGrown.gov: In 2021 DoAg updated or created more than 100 pages on CTGrown.gov. State funding spent on this initiative in 2021 was limited to staff time. DoAg continued to update and maintain 15 guidance documents to **help farmers navigate the agricultural industry during a pandemic.**

The **reorganization of the website** is beginning to take place and will continue to evolve as the needs are identified along the way. Digital Services performed an audit across the DoAg website and provided feedback and reports which included broken links found across the agency website, orphaned content that was not linked to another page, a Google Analytics Report, and a Content Auditor Report. Digital Services made recommendations on creating a space where information is accessible to all regardless of reading level, or disabilities. These recommendations will be taken into consideration moving forward in the development of the new structure of the website. **Website accessibility has been made a priority** for an enhanced audience experience on the website and will continue to improve.

Consumer-directed information has migrated to CTGrown.org and licensing information has been moved from CTGrown.gov onto the eLicense platform.

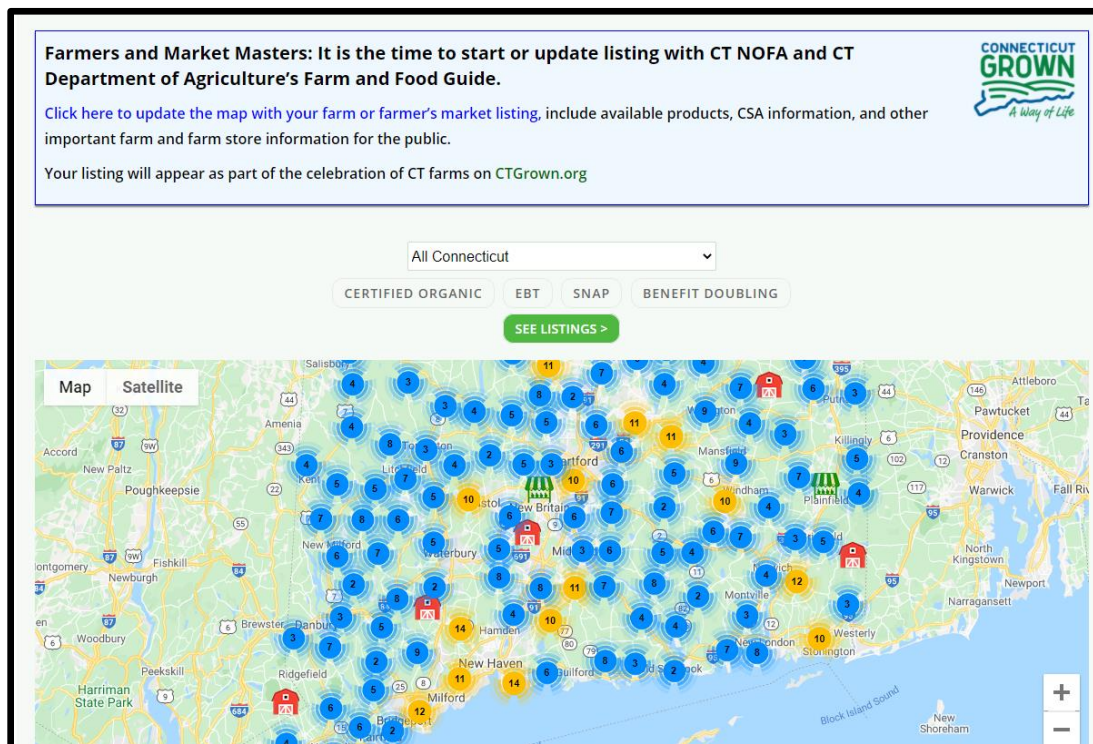
CTGrownMap.com: In 2021, the domain www.CTGrownMap.com was renewed in order to continue directing consumers to the CT NOFA Local Farm and Food Guide. DoAg continued to maintain a Google form to collect additional farms, farmers' markets, and farm stores to be added to CTGrownMap.com map. **The map was also integrated into the new CTGrown.org consumer-facing website** to provide additional exposure for those listed on the map and make it even easier for consumers to find CT Grown farm products. Through the partnership with CT NOFA updates to the map included expanded search functionality and identification of various programs including SNAP, EBT, and Benefit Doubling to showcase alternative payment methods accepted by producers.

In 2021, the CTGrownMap.com received 102,194 pageviews and 27,789 new individual users.

2022 Goals & Initiatives

CTGrown.gov: Producer and industry information will continue to be maintained on the CTGrown.gov platform while the CTGrown.org continues to provide consumer-based information. The new website administrator is working to develop a user-friendly format to allow for information to be accessible to everyone in an easier fashion. The design will be carefully thought out and discussed with the various bureaus before the release of the new formatting is released. Featured links are continuing to be changed as different programs become available to producers and seasons change. Protocols and templates are being used to create consistency across the entire department website.

CTGrownMap.com: The CT Department of Agriculture has an agreement with CT NOFA to continue the partnership. The goal is to expand the number of resources listed, improve accuracy of each listing, and consider translation options to better serve a more diverse audience. Directing consumers to the map shall continue to be through CTGrown.org, the agency's consumer facing website. The map remains the primary source of information on how to find CT Grown farm products on CTGrown.org.



Anticipated Risks and Interdependences

CTGrown.gov: The success and timely launch of the new website navigation will depend on the support of all bureaus and content administrators. There are many moving pieces that may extend the anticipated launch date for the new structure of the website.

CTGrownMap.com: Continuation of the map and funding to maintain it, currently resides through an agreement with CT NOFA. Long-term funding and maintenance are currently be addressed through conversations between DoAg and CT NOFA. It is a long-term goal of both organizations to ensure the resource created becomes self-sustaining for the betterment of the industry.

Efforts to Promote Interaction and Business Relationships between Farmers and Potential Institutional/Wholesale Purchasers of Connecticut Grown Farm Products: FARM-TO-SCHOOL PROGRAM

Program Overview

The Farm-to-School Program (FTS) is a statewide marketing initiative designed to encourage Connecticut public schools to use Connecticut Grown fresh fruits and vegetables, proteins, and milk products in their cafeteria meals and snacks. The program helps develop new markets for Connecticut farm businesses and helps increase Connecticut Grown foods in the state's school meal programs, thereby increasing the long-term viability of the Connecticut farms growing/producing those items.

[Statute: Sec 22-38d](#) Farm to School Program. Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids Week.

NEW in 2021, [P.A. 21-0002, S. 364](#): CT Grown for CT Kids Grant Program.

The FTS Program includes the following components:

- Encouraging **Connecticut farmers to sell their products** to educational institutions.
- Developing and regularly updating a **database of farmers interested in selling their products to Connecticut educational institutions**, including the types and amounts of products the farmers want to sell and the time periods during which the farmers want to sell.
- **Facilitating purchases from local farmers** by such interested educational institutions.
- Providing **outreach and guidance to farmers** concerning the value of and procedure for selling their products to such interested educational institutions.
- **Bridging the gap between school food service directors and Connecticut farm businesses** to increase the use of Connecticut Grown products in Connecticut educational institutions.

Our program partners include the State Department of Education, Department of Administrative Services, University of Connecticut's Cooperative Extension System, the School Nutrition Association of Connecticut, FoodCorps Connecticut, school food service directors, and Connecticut farmers. DoAg is a partner in the Connecticut Farm to School Collaborative- a formal network and working group which is co-led by UConn Extension and FoodCorps and attended by CSDE, DPH, school food directors, producers, non-profits, and many others. Additionally, DoAg collaborates with Farm to Institution New England.

2021 Accomplishments

In 2021 the following was accomplished:

- Strengthened DoAg's leadership position in the CT Farm to School Collaborative, a statewide networking group for Farm to School activities by serving as the co-lead for the Values Based Sourcing and Purchasing Team which focuses on facilitating local procurement efforts in schools and working with school food program leads/producers to identify and overcome barriers.
- Participate in a series of strategic planning sessions to build a new strategic plan of the CT Farm to School Collaborative. Actively involved in the creation of a steering committee which DoAg will have a seat on.
- Organized partners (Put Local on Your Tray, FoodCorps CT, CT State Department of Education and others) to create

**DoAg's FTS Program
was awarded
\$82,000 from the
USDA Farm to
School Grant in
collaboration with
UConn, SDE, &
FoodCorps CT**

material for 2021 CT Grown for CT Kids Week, October 4-8, 2021.

- Helped develop and promote a menu of activities for schools to engage with farm to school programming throughout the year. Helped to develop social media and outreach toolkits for distribution to schools.
- Received \$82,000 in funding through the USDA Farm to School grant program in collaboration with UConn Extension, Connecticut Department of Education, and FoodCorps CT. The funding will enable us to conduct research on current CT Grown purchasing amounts in schools, lead in depth procurement-based work with four school districts, and to create equity focused educational promotion campaigns
- Attended a multi-day national farm to school producer training held by National Center for Appropriate Technology, USDA, and National FTS network to form the basis for a CT state producer training.
- The CT Grown for CT Kids grant program was passed in the 2021 legislative special session is, a statewide grant for schools, early childcare providers, boards of education, and partner organizations to provide financial support to create and further farm to school initiatives. DoAg is the administering agency of the grant.
- Created the structure for the new grants program and opened it for applications on October 26, 2021. The application period closed on December 20, 2021, and received 60 applications. Awards will be announced in 2022 and a second application period will be opened in the Spring of 2022.

2022 Goals & Initiatives

1. Pursue data collection funded by the USDA Farm to School grant which focuses efforts to establish a baseline of understanding around the current school food procurement activity in the state;
2. Increase engagement with school food directors in collaboration with CSDE (school food directors, administrators) to educate on how to effectively use different federal nutrition funding for local purchasing;
3. Increase engagement with CT producers at all scales, educating them on how to sell to schools and informing them that it can be a viable, stable market outlet;
4. Focus on culturally relevant crops in school meals and the importance of celebrating those foods;
5. Work on increasing connections of farmers of color to schools, particularly those involved in urban agriculture in close proximity to low-income schools and who can benefit greatly from revenue that schools can provide;
6. Create a more user-friendly online database that allows schools and producers to connect and identify products for purchase;
7. Provide technical support to successful and unsuccessful applicants from the 2021 CT Grown for CT Kids Grant. Revise program and open second round in late summer/early fall 2022.

Anticipated Risks and Interdependences

The farm to school space is complex and extends far beyond that of local food procurement; it is an intricate mix of education, procurement, and consumption.

Some risk and interdependences of note:

- The CT Grown for CT Kids grant currently only has funding authorized for two years under the American Rescue Plan Act.
- Legislative changes/action around farm to school
- Decreased capacity of schools to participate in Farm to School activities as attention is focused on pandemic recovery both in staffing and financially.

Efforts to Promote Interaction and Business Relationships between Farmers and Potential Institutional/Wholesale Purchasers of Connecticut Grown farm Products: FARM-TO-CHEF PROGRAM

Program Overview

The Farm-to-Chef Program helps connect Connecticut chefs and food service providers with growers, producers, and distributors of Connecticut Grown products. It also helps the public locate restaurants, institutions, and other dining facilities that serve foods prepared with Connecticut Grown ingredients. More information can be found on the program's website: <http://www.ctfarmtochef.com/>

The program enables:

- Increased awareness of CT Grown farm products for consumers at participating venues
- Farmers benefit from increased demand for and sales of Connecticut Grown products enabling those farmers to grow their businesses.

2021 Accomplishments

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the program in 2021. This year, the main limiting factor for restaurants to participate in Farm to Chef week was staff capacity. Many restaurants were not able to take on the additional work thus participation was limited to a few restaurants who already have a well-established CT Grown sourcing system.

- **Thirteen restaurants, two congregate meal locations, one school, and one culinary training program participated** serving a total of 3,655 meals with \$12,750 spent on Connecticut grown product from Connecticut farms.
- A kickoff event was held at City Seed's Wooster Square Farmers Market in New Haven CT. The event brought an additional commodity to the market (shellfish producer) and featured two cooking demonstrations from local vegan, women of color chefs Poreyah Benton and Chrissy Tracey. The event shared details of Farm-to Chef Week and promoted the participating venues Farm-to-Chef Week 2021 as well as general consumer awareness of the CT Grown program.
- Farm-to-Chef Week was sponsored by Highland Park Market, Skyline Studios, CT Dairy, Farm Credit East, Freshpoint, Bozzuto's, and Sardilli Produce. DoAg promoted Farm-to-Chef Week and it's sponsors on WNPR with a total of 20 Sponsor IDs on promos and 2 Sponsor IDs before the 2021 *Seasoned* show. This included 24, 15-second spots and a digital banner on the Seasoned webpage and WNPR.org as well as in the WNPR weekly e-newsletter at a total cost of \$3,000, generating 80,656 digital ad impressions.

2022 Goals & Initiatives

- **Additional inclusion of shellfish** and other aquaculture products in Farm-to-Chef promotions.
- **Coordinate networking events for shellfish producers and restaurant chefs/buyers** through collaboration with DoAg's Bureau of Aquaculture and UConn SeaGrant, as well as networking events for other specialty crop producers. Further, work with SeaGrant and CT Restaurant Association to create a Chef to Farm shell recycling program.
- **Emphasize culturally relevant crops** and connecting farmers to restaurants who desire to incorporate those crops/already do in their menus.
- **Create a more user-friendly online database** that allows restaurants and producers to connect and identify products for purchase.

- **Expand Farm-to-Chef promotional events** beyond Farm to Chef Week. Form a Farm to Chef working group comprised of farmers, chefs, and community-based food entrepreneur programs.
- Strategically **evaluate successes and weaknesses** in Farm to Chef marketing and audience engaged.
- **Create a stronger connection to the large CT Grown marketing campaign** through leveraging local chefs to share recipes and create recipe video content.
- **Engage DECD Office of Tourism** to help promote CT Restaurants who source CT Grown.

Anticipated Risks and Interdependences

As a result of the pandemic, two risks/interdependences have been identified:

- Restaurants may have more limited spending budgets this year as they begin to recover from the pandemic
- Restaurants may experience fewer customers this year as restrictions are still in place and mass vaccination is on-going
- Restaurants are experiencing significant staff shortages which limited participation in 2021 and will likely continue into 2022.

Efforts to Promote Interaction and Business Relationships between Farmers and Potential Institutional/Wholesale Purchasers of Connecticut Grown farm Products: FARM-TO-WHOLESALE PROGRAM

Program Overview

The Farm-to-Wholesale Program helps connect Connecticut farmers and producers with wholesale distributors, grocery stores, and retailers offering Connecticut Grown agricultural goods.

The program increases demand for and sales of Connecticut Grown products enabling farmers to grow their businesses and improve accessibility of Connecticut Grown products at local food suppliers, restaurants to grocery stores.

2021 Accomplishments

DoAg maintained membership with the New England Produce Council and the Eastern Produce Council. These organizations hold regional produce trade shows to connect producers with buyers from local, regional, and national markets. DoAg attends these events with Connecticut producers in an effort to promote wholesale sales of Connecticut Grown products. DoAg continued to aid producers in finding new markets as traditional outlets closed due to COVID. Through the CTGrownMap.com, partnerships with UCONN Put Local on Your Tray, and grocery and retail outlets, producers were able to continue product sales despite closings or breakdown of the traditional supply chain.

2022 Goals & Initiatives

1. **Create a more user-friendly online database** that allows wholesalers and producers to connect and identify products for purchase
2. **Increase collaboration** with the Northwest Connecticut Food Hub, Brass City Harvest Food Hub, and other local aggregation organizations
3. **Organize buyer networking events** to introduce buyers from distributors, grocery and retail to meet with Connecticut producers
4. Work with DoAg's Regulatory Unit to **provide general education on food safety** and other opportunities that would increase producer's abilities to sell to wholesale outlets
5. **Explore increased engagement with the health care sector**, particularly focused on elderly and other vulnerable populations
6. **The recently announced USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement is an opportunity to provide short term funding for purchased products**, to develop sustainable partnerships with new outlets for producers such as the emergency food network and community health centers, and to increase food hub's prominence and capacity.

Anticipated Risks and Interdependences

- Wholesalers and their customers may have more limited spending budgets this year as they begin to recover from the pandemic and tragic weather events.
- Customers of wholesalers may experience fewer customers this year as restrictions are still in place and mass vaccination is ongoing.

Efforts to Promote Interaction and Business Relationships between Farmers and Potential Institutional/Wholesale Purchasers of Connecticut Grown farm Products: FOOD EXPORT NORTHEAST

Program Overview

The Department of Agriculture is a member of [Food Export Northeast](#), a State Regional Trade Group (SRTG), which works to promote agricultural and food products produced in the Northeast. In addition to offering educational resources, DoAg works closely with Food Export Northeast to organize trade shows both domestically and internationally to promote CT Grown products. Farmers and food producers benefit from increased demand for and sales of CT Grown products enabling those farmers to expand their businesses domestically and into international markets.

2021 Accomplishments

- The Food Export program assisted eighteen CT companies participate in 80 export related activities and services in 2021. Activities included virtual webinars on export essentials, virtual Trade Missions, Market Builder research assistance, and utilization of the Export Advisor and Food Export Helpline programs.
- Assisted in the creation and planning phases of the “New England Goes Global: How Small Food Companies Can Gain International Success” virtual seminar. The seminar was held in early January 2021.
- Assisted five (5) CT food businesses with participation in the Food Export Branded Program, a cost-share reimbursement program. These companies received \$144,108 in reimbursements to date, with claims still being processed, from Food Export NE. Reimbursed expenses included items such as travel expenses to travel to Food and Beverage trade shows to promote CT Grown and made products, new packaging design to comply with international food labels and marketing assistance.

2022 Goals & Initiatives

- Promote the Food Export Branded Program and virtual activities at shared use kitchen facilities.
- Have an additional two (2) CT food businesses participate in the Food Export Branded Program.

Anticipated Risks and Interdependences

- Some food businesses will need to recover international business lost due to the pandemic.

The Food Export Program assisted 23 CT food companies participating in 81 export related activities, providing over \$140,000 in reimbursements

Grant In-Aid:

FARM VIABILITY GRANTS PROGRAM: TRANSITION GRANTS

Program Overview

[The Farm Transition Grant](#) (FTG) provides matching funds to Connecticut farmers and agricultural cooperatives for the diversification of existing farm operations, transitioning to value-added agricultural production and sales, and other venues in which a majority of products sold are grown in the state.

Funding for the Farm Transition Grant is provided through [C.G.S. Sec. 22-26k](#).

2021 Accomplishments

- Utilized industry feedback gained through the 2020 virtual focus group with agricultural producers to implement a new structure to the 2021 Farm Transition Grant Program.
- Applicants now have the option of applying for one of four grant categories within the Farm Transition Grant Program: New Farmer Micro Grant, Infrastructure Investment Grant, Research and Development Grant, Innovation and Diversification Grant.
 - Each category has a unique maximum award amount and cash match requirement.
- The 2021 Transition Grant Program received a total of 64 applications.
 - 53% applied to the Infrastructure Investment category.
 - 19% applied to the Innovation and Diversification category.
 - 28% applied to the New Farmer Micro Grant category.
 - There were no applications for the Research and Development or Crisis and Emergency Response categories.
- Awarded \$445,000 in grant funds to support 23 CT farm operations. Projects support a wide variety of agricultural production industries such as honey production, nursery and greenhouse growers, livestock and fruit and vegetable production.
 - The 23 grant awards were distributed amongst 22 towns in seven counties.
 - 48.05% of grant funds were awarded to support four Innovation and Diversification projects
 - Awardees in this category received an average of \$47,442.50
 - 44.68% of grant funds were awarded to support 13 Infrastructure Investment projects
 - Awardees in this category received an average of \$13,572.84
 - 7.26% of grant funds were awarded to support six New Farmer Micro Grant projects
 - Awardees in this category received an average of \$4,781.17

**\$445,000 in grant funds were awarded to 23
CT farm operations in 2021**

2022 Goals & Initiatives

Initiatives:

- To utilize the new structure of the Farm Transition Grant to better support a variety of projects that will assist new farmers as they establish themselves in the agricultural industry in CT, expand existing farm operations to better serve their communities and allow all producers to develop and market new products utilizing CT Grown components.

- To increase grant outreach through all available networks to ensure that the applicant pool for the Farm Transition Grant is diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

Goals:

- Award 10% of grant funds to New Farmer Micro Grant projects.
 - Better support new farmers with 1-3 years of production history.
 - Adding question(s) to the grant narrative that asks for a summary of the agricultural/farm experience new farmers had prior to starting their own businesses.
- Increase the number of applicants and awards to BIPOC producers.
 - Need to utilize Salesforce to its fullest potential by capturing data on applicants.
- Encourage CT farmers to be innovative and conduct research on or develop new value-added products through the Research and Development and Innovation and Diversification Grant awards.
- Publish previous grant awardees Success Stories in the Weekly Ag Report and on the Transition Grant page of the DoAg website to highlight the impact and outcomes of completed projects.
- Implement recommendations brought forward by the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Working Group

Anticipated Risks and Interdependences

- Implications of setting benchmarks for awarding New Farmers and BIPOC producers
 - What happens if there are not enough applicants from those groups to meet goals?
 - Need to offset the risk by increasing outreach.
- Partnerships with other farmer service provider agencies such as USDA FSA, CT NOFA and Farm Credit East remain an integral part of promoting the Farm Transition Grant as well as helping to fill funding gaps.
- New Farmer Micro Grant is a new venture for DoAg and risk is involved in funding farmers that are not as established.

Grant In-Aid:

FARM VIABILITY GRANT PROGRAM: VIABILITY GRANTS

Program Overview

[The Farm Viability Grant](#) provides matching funds to Connecticut municipalities, groups of municipalities, regional councils of governments, and/or agricultural non-profit organizations for projects that directly impact and/or foster agricultural viability. Projects advance farming and agriculture as defined by Connecticut General Statutes Section 1-1(q).

2021 Accomplishments

- Utilized feedback gained during a 2020 virtual focus group with agricultural non-profits and municipalities to implement needed updates to the 2021 Farm Viability Grant Program.
- The four areas of focus for which applicants could apply for included: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI); Food Supply Chain; Land Accessibility; and Urban Agriculture.
- There were 17 applications for the 2021 Farm Viability Grant.
 - 47% applied for the Food Supply Chain area of focus
 - 23.6% applied for the Urban Agriculture area of focus
 - 17.6% applied for the DEI area of focus
 - 11.8% applied for the Land Accessibility area of focus
- Awarded \$265,000 in grant funds to six agricultural non-profits, one municipality, and one regional council of governments. Project examples consisted of developing a work program for individuals with disabilities to develop skills for careers in agriculture/agritourism, establishing a no-till equipment sharing program for farmers to make more land available to regional farmers, and creating a program to provide agricultural training and job opportunities for previously incarcerated individuals.
 - The eight grant awards were distributed among 7 towns in 5 counties.
 - 50% of grant funds were awarded to support four Food Supply Chain projects.
 - Awardees of this area received an average of \$33,126
 - 18.8% of grant funds were awarded to support one DEI project.
 - Awardees of this area received an average of \$49,881
 - 18.8% of grant funds were awarded to support one Land Accessibility project.
 - Awardees of this area received an average of \$49,760
 - 12.5% of grant funds were awarded to support two Urban Agriculture projects.
 - Awardees of this area received an average of \$16,619

Four areas of focus were established for the 2021 program: Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI); Food Supply Chain; Land Accessibility; and Urban Agriculture

2022 Goals & Initiatives

Initiatives

- The Farm Viability Grant Program is re-structured to fund projects that address areas of need in the CT agricultural industry.
- As needs of the CT agricultural industry evolve over time, the Questions of Focus used during Viability grant applications should reflect those changes of need.

- To increase grant outreach through all available networks to ensure that the applicant pool for the Farm Viability Grant is diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

Goals

- Continue to support efforts towards urban and non-traditional farming practices as proposed in *An Act Enhancing CT Agriculture* (Sec 22-26j)
- Implement recommendations from the Governor's Council on Climate Change Report when available relating to building a more equitable food system through urban agriculture.
- Implement recommendations brought forward by the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Working Group.
- To publish previous Viability Grant awardees success stories in the Weekly Ag Report, and on the Viability Grant page on the DoAg website

Anticipated Risks and Interdependences

- The application and grant submission format and focus areas of the Farm Viability Grant will be an adjustment to applicants.
- 2022 will continue to be a year where agricultural non-profits financially recover from the pandemic and adjust their efforts in supporting farmers.